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**16 March 2026**



# ONLY COMPETITION IAS

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**CSE Prep Only Competition Pvt Ltd.**

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## Assembly Elections 2026: Polls in 4 States and 1 UT from April 9, Counting on May 4

### Why in News?

- ❖ The Election Commission of India (ECI) on 16 March 2026 announced the schedule for simultaneous Assembly elections in four states—Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal—and one Union Territory (UT), Puducherry.
- ❖ Polling will begin on April 9 in Assam, Kerala, and Puducherry, with Tamil Nadu voting on April 23 and West Bengal in two phases on April 21 and 23. Vote counting is set for May 4, alongside bypolls to eight vacant Assembly seats across various states.
- ❖ The announcement enforces the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) immediately, amid political reactions: Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala swung into action, Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal welcomed fewer phases, and parties like BJP, Congress, and regional alliances (e.g., United Democratic Front in Kerala) geared up.
- ❖ This cycle, affecting over 18 crore voters, highlights ECI's push for fewer phases to reduce costs and disruptions, while addressing concerns like violence in West Bengal and coalition dynamics in Tamil Nadu/Puducherry. The polls test national parties' strategies post-2024 Lok Sabha results, with implications for federal politics.

### Key Details of the Announcement

- **Poll Schedule and Phases:**
  - Assam (126 seats): Single phase on April 9.
  - Kerala (140 seats): Single phase on April 9.
  - Puducherry (30 seats): Single phase on April 9.
  - Tamil Nadu (234 seats): Single phase on April 23.
  - West Bengal (294 seats): Two phases on April 21 (132 seats) and April 23 (162 seats).
  - Counting of Votes: May 4 for all.

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- Bypolls: To 8 Assembly seats (spread across states like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and others; reasons include deaths, resignations).
- **Voter and Logistical Data:**
  - Total Voters: Approximately 18.68 crore (West Bengal: 7.32 crore; Tamil Nadu: 6.24 crore; Kerala: 2.74 crore; Assam: 2.4 crore; Puducherry: 0.98 lakh).
  - Polling Stations: Over 2.5 lakh, with enhanced EVMs/VVPATs and webcasting for transparency.
  - Nomination Dates: Begin around March 23 for first phase; last date for withdrawal April 2-5 (phase-wise).
- **ECI Measures:**
  - MCC Enforcement: Immediate curbs on new schemes, transfers, and ads; focus on curbing money/muscle power.
  - Special Provisions: Vulnerable polling booths in West Bengal (due to past violence); COVID-19 protocols retained (e.g., sanitization, staggered voting).
  - Tech Integration: cVIGIL app for complaints; Suvidha portal for permissions.
- **Political Reactions:**
  - LDF (Kerala): Swung into action, criticizing UDF for alliances.
  - TMC (West Bengal): Welcomed fewer phases, asserting 'democracy's bedrock'.
  - BJP: Pushed for 'adjournment' of corrupt regimes; targeted TMC and DMK.
  - Congress: Highlighted ECI's role in fair polls; alliances in Tamil Nadu (with DMK) and Assam.
  - Other: AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, AGP in Assam preparing manifestos.
- **Contextual Notes:**

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- Fewer phases compared to 2021 (West Bengal had 8 phases then), attributed to improved security.
- Bypolls triggered by recent vacancies (e.g., MLA deaths/resignations).

## Background: Roots of the Elections

- **Constitutional Framework:** Under Article 172, state Assemblies have a 5-year term (expiring in May/June 2026 for these states/UT). ECI conducts polls under Representation of People Act, 1951; MCC since 1960 to ensure level playing field.
- **Previous Cycles (2021):** TMC retained West Bengal amid violence; LDF won Kerala (historic second term); DMK ousted AIADMK in Tamil Nadu; BJP held Assam; Congress-led in Puducherry (later lost to NDA). Post-2024 LS polls, shifts include BJP's gains in Assam/West Bengal.
- **Key Issues:** Regionalism vs. Nationalism; welfare schemes (e.g., Kanyashree in Bengal, freebies in Tamil Nadu); ethnic tensions in Assam; left vs. right in Kerala; instability in Puducherry (multiple govt changes).
- **ECI Reforms:** Post-2019, emphasis on EVM integrity, voter turnout (target 75%); 2022 amendments to RP Act for Aadhaar linkage.
- **Challenges:** Poll violence (West Bengal 2021 saw 1,000+ incidents); money power (seizures worth ₹1,000 crore in 2021); low turnout in urban areas.

## Implications

- **Political Landscape:** Tests BJP's expansion in South/East; TMC's hold in Bengal; DMK's dominance in Tamil Nadu; LDF's continuity in Kerala. Potential realignments (e.g., BJP-AIADMK tie-up).
- **Federalism and Governance:** Outcomes influence Rajya Sabha balance; impact on central schemes like PMAY in these states.
- **Economic/Social:** Polls disrupt business (e.g., tea industry in Assam); focus on post-COVID recovery, jobs, and inflation.



- **Electoral Integrity:** Reinforces ECI's independence amid debates on simultaneous polls (One Nation One Election proposal).
- **For India:**
  - **Democracy:** Boosts voter participation; highlights diversity in multi-party system.
  - **Security:** Central forces deployment (e.g., 1,000 companies in Bengal) to prevent violence.
  - **Economic:** Short-term slowdown in project approvals due to MCC; long-term policy continuity.
  - **Social:** Addresses issues like women's safety (Nirbhaya funds), tribal rights in Assam.

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## UPSC CSE State PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: Model Code of Conduct, EVM/VVPAT, Representation of People Act, 1951, Article 324 (ECI powers).
- Data: Number of seats (e.g., West Bengal 294); Voter turnout trends (2021: Kerala 73%).
- Related: Chief Election Commissioners, SVEEP program.

### GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Electoral reforms and ECI's role.
- Federalism: State elections and central interventions.

GS-2 (IR) - Marginal: Impact on India's image as world's largest democracy.

### GS-3 (Economy)

- Poll economics: Freebies and fiscal implications.

### Essay / Interview

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- “Simultaneous Elections in India: Prospects and Challenges in Federal Setup.”
- “Role of Election Commission in Upholding Democratic Integrity: Lessons from 2026 Assembly Polls.”

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## MCQs

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1. With reference to the 2026 Assembly elections announced by ECI, consider the following statements:
2. West Bengal will vote in two phases on April 21 and 23.
3. Tamil Nadu and Kerala will poll on the same day, April 9.
4. Vote counting for all states/UT is scheduled on May 4.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (b)**

2. The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) comes into force:

- (a) After polling ends
- (b) On the day of counting
- (c) Immediately after election schedule announcement
- (d) One month before polls

**Answer: (c)**

3. Which of the following states/UT has the highest number of Assembly seats in the 2026 polls?



- (a) Kerala
- (b) West Bengal
- (c) Tamil Nadu
- (d) Assam

**Answer: (b)**

4. The Election Commission of India derives its powers primarily from:

- (a) Article 172
- (b) Article 324
- (c) Article 356
- (d) Article 370

**Answer: (b)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "The announcement of Assembly election schedules by ECI underscores the challenges of conducting free and fair polls in a diverse federation." Discuss in the context of the 2026 polls and suggest measures for electoral reforms. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the political significance of multi-phase polling in states like West Bengal. How does it impact security and voter turnout? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Regional parties continue to dominate state elections in India." Examine this statement with reference to the key contenders in the 2026 Assembly polls. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Strengthening Electoral Democracy: The Role of Institutions like ECI in Navigating Federal and Political Challenges."



## Supreme Court Ruling on DGP Appointments: No Provision for UPSC to Condon Delays

### Why in News?

- ❖ The Supreme Court of India, in a landmark ruling on 15 March 2026, held that the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has no provision to condone inordinate delays in the empanelment process for appointing Directors General of Police (DGPs) in states.
- ❖ This decision came in response to a plea highlighting delays by state governments in submitting proposals for shortlisting DGPs, emphasizing adherence to the Prakash Singh guidelines.
- ❖ Attorney-General R. Venkataramani opined that such delays are "excessive" and irregular, requiring states to approach the SC for any extensions or condonations. UPSC has revised its rules for the empanelment of DGPs and Heads of Police Forces (HoPF), mandating that proposals for shortlisting three DGPs must be submitted at least three months prior to the retirement of the incumbent.
- ❖ The ruling aims to prevent political interference in police leadership appointments, ensuring merit-based selections. This development reinforces police reforms, amid ongoing concerns over state-centre tensions in federal policing structures.

### Key Details of the Ruling

- **Supreme Court's Observations:**
  - No provision under UPSC rules to condone delays in submitting proposals for DGP empanelment.
  - States must seek SC approval for any irregularity or delay, as proceeding without it would violate Prakash Singh directives.
  - Delays deemed "excessive" if proposals are not sent three months before the incumbent's retirement.
  - The court noted that such delays undermine the independence of police forces and allow for potential political manipulations.

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- **UPSC's Revised Rules:**

- Empanelment process for DGPs/HoPF now requires states to submit proposals for convening the Empanelment Committee Meeting in violation directions.
- Shortlisting of three DGPs based on seniority, service record, and integrity; UPSC to finalize the panel.
- States cannot appoint acting or interim DGPs without UPSC approval beyond short periods.

- **Attorney-General's Opinion:**

- Highlighted that delays lead to "irregularly had occurred" scenarios, recommending SC intervention.
- Emphasized the need for timely processes to maintain law and order efficiency.

- **Context of the Case:**

- Stemmed from a plea regarding delays in states like Tamil Nadu and others, where governments delayed submissions, leading to ad-hoc appointments.
- The SC bench, led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, reiterated the 2006 Prakash Singh judgment's intent to insulate police from political control.

- **Immediate Impact:**

- Several states (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal) directed to comply immediately or face contempt proceedings.
- UPSC to review pending proposals and report back to SC within a month.

## Background: Roots of the Issue

- **Prakash Singh Case (2006):** Landmark SC judgment in Prakash Singh vs. Union of India, directing states to establish Police Establishment Boards for transfers/postings, fix minimum two-year tenure for DGPs, and select DGPs from a UPSC-empanelled list of three senior officers to reduce political interference.



- **Police Reforms in India:** Police is a state subject under List II of the Seventh Schedule, but central guidelines (via Model Police Act, 2006) aim for uniformity. Issues like supersession of officers and arbitrary removals have persisted, leading to multiple SC interventions (e.g., 2018 ruling on DGP tenure).
- **Recent Developments:** In 2024-25, controversies in states like Punjab and Maharashtra over DGP appointments amid elections highlighted delays. UPSC's 2026 rule revision follows SC's 2025 observations on "inordinate delays" in empanelment.
- **Federal Tensions:** Centre-state friction over policing, with states accusing UPSC of bias, while the Centre pushes for reforms via schemes like SMART Policing.
- **Related Laws:** Police Act, 1861 (colonial-era); CrPC/IPC provisions on police powers; Article 311 (protection against arbitrary removal).

## Implications

- **For Police Reforms:** Strengthens insulation of police from political influence; promotes meritocracy and stability in leadership, reducing crime response inefficiencies.
- **Federalism and Centre-State Relations:** Reinforces SC's role as arbiter in disputes; may lead to more litigation if states delay, but ensures accountability. Potential for uniform national standards in policing.
- **Administrative Efficiency:** Timely appointments to prevent vacuums; could reduce corruption in promotions/transfers.
- **Broader Governance:** Aligns with SDG 16 (peaceful societies, effective institutions); impacts law and order, especially in election-bound states.
- **For India:**
  - **Security:** Better coordination in internal security (e.g., Naxalism, terrorism) via professional DGPs.
  - **Judicial Overreach Concerns:** Critics argue SC micromanaging executive functions, but supporters see it as necessary for reforms.



- **Political:** Opposition states may use this to challenge "central overreach," while ruling party states comply swiftly.

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## UPSC CSE Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: Prakash Singh Judgment, UPSC Empanelment, DGP Tenure, Police Establishment Board.
- Data: Minimum DGP tenure (2 years); UPSC's role in All India Services.
- Related: Seventh Schedule (State List: Police), Article 32 (writs for fundamental rights).

### GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Police reforms and SC interventions.
- Federalism: Centre-state relations in law enforcement.

**GS-2 (IR)** - Marginal link to internal security affecting foreign policy (e.g., border policing).

### GS-3 (Internal Security)

- Challenges in police administration; role of UPSC in ensuring integrity.

### Essay / Interview

- "Judicial Activism in Police Reforms: Balancing Federalism and Accountability in India."
- "From Prakash Singh to 2026: The Evolving Landscape of DGP Appointments and Its Impact on Governance."

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## MCQs

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1. With reference to the Supreme Court's ruling on DGP appointments (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. UPSC has no provision to condone inordinate delays in empanelment proposals.



3. States must submit proposals at least three months prior to the incumbent DGP's retirement.
4. The ruling stems from the 2006 Prakash Singh judgment.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (d)**

2. The Prakash Singh vs. Union of India case (2006) primarily dealt with:

- (a) Judicial reforms
- (b) Police reforms
- (c) Electoral reforms
- (d) Administrative reforms

**Answer: (b)**

3. Under the revised UPSC rules for DGP empanelment, how many candidates are shortlisted for the top post?

- (a) One
- (b) Two
- (c) Three
- (d) Five

**Answer: (c)**



4. Police as a subject falls under which List of the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution?

- (a) Union List
- (b) State List
- (c) Concurrent List
- (d) Residuary Powers

**Answer: (b)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "The Supreme Court's intervention in DGP appointments underscores the need for systemic police reforms in India." Discuss in light of the March 2026 ruling and its implications for federalism. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the role of the Prakash Singh judgment in insulating police forces from political interference. How does the recent SC ruling on delays in empanelment further this objective? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Delays in administrative processes like DGP appointments pose a threat to internal security and governance." Examine the statement in the context of the 2026 UPSC rule revisions and suggest measures for timely compliance. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Judicial Oversight in Executive Appointments: The Case of Police Reforms and Federal Balance in Contemporary India."

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## ISRO Study: Exposed Ice Patches on Melting Himalayan Glaciers Pose Greater Flood Threat Than Previously Thought

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### Why in News?

- ❖ A study by scientists from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), published in the journal *Natural Hazards*, has revealed that the presence of exposed ice patches on



retreating glaciers, such as the Srikanta Glacier in Uttarakhand, serves as a critical early warning signal for flash floods.

- ❖ This finding stems from analysis of the devastating flood in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on August 5, 2025, which destroyed several villages, killed over 200 people, and caused widespread infrastructure damage. The study highlights how climate change-induced warming is accelerating deglaciation, leading to ice patch exposure that thins glacier cover and increases flood risks.
- ❖ ISRO's satellite observations (using resources like Cartosat and Resourcesat) detected these patches just before the 2025 event, underscoring the need for enhanced monitoring. Amid rising Himalayan disasters (e.g., 2021 Chamoli flood), this research calls for integrating satellite data into disaster management.
- ❖ As of 2026, with similar events reported in Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim, the study remains pivotal for policy, prompting calls for updated glacial monitoring protocols by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

## Key Details of the Study

- **Study Findings:**
  - Exposed ice patches on glaciers indicate ongoing deglaciation and serve as a direct landscape indicator for flood likelihood. These patches form when warmer temperatures cause seasonal snow to melt, revealing underlying ice that thins the glacier beyond a critical point.
  - In the Srikanta Glacier case, satellite imagery showed ice patches increasing before the August 2025 flood, leading to a sudden collapse and flash flood in the Rishi Ganga river.
  - The study analyzed high-altitude Himalayan regions, finding that such patches can trigger downstream-mass movement, including debris flows and landslides.
- **Methodology:**



- Utilized ISRO's satellite data (e.g., Cartosat for high-resolution imagery, Resourcesat for multi-spectral analysis) to monitor ablation periods.
- Compared pre- and post-event imagery to link ice patch exposure to flood triggers.
- Cryospheric indicators like snow and film cover were assessed, showing that thinned glaciers are more vulnerable to seasonal melting.
- **Flood Impact (2025 Event):**
  - Affected Chamoli district, Uttarakhand; destroyed villages like Raini and downstream areas; over 200 deaths, including workers at hydropower projects.
  - Triggered by glacier collapse, exacerbated by heavy rains; similar to 2021 Chamoli disaster but with clearer satellite precursors.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Advocate for real-time satellite monitoring of Himalayan glaciers to predict floods.
  - Call for focusing on glacial lakes and ice patches in disaster risk assessments, beyond just glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs).
  - Suggest policy integration with NDMA and state disaster agencies for early warning systems.
- **Current Relevance (2026):**
  - Recent events: Similar ice patch-linked floods in Lahaul-Spiti (Himachal, Jan 2026) and Teesta Valley (Sikkim, Feb 2026).
  - ISRO's ongoing missions (e.g., NISAR satellite launch in 2025) enhance such monitoring capabilities.

## Background: Roots of the Issue

- **Himalayan Glaciers and Climate Change:** The Himalayas host over 9,000 glaciers, feeding major rivers like Ganga and Indus. Rapid warming (1.5 times global average) has led to 20-30% glacial retreat since the 1970s, per IPCC reports. Events like Kedarnath



(2013) and Chamoli (2021, 2025) highlight increasing frequency of GLOFs and flash floods.

- **ISRO's Role in Monitoring:** ISRO has been using remote sensing since the 1980s (e.g., Bhuvan portal for glacial mapping). The 2025 study builds on earlier work, like the 2021 Chamoli analysis, emphasizing cryospheric changes.
- **Previous Disasters:**
  - 2021 Chamoli: Glacier avalanche killed 200+; NTPC project damaged.
  - 2013 Uttarakhand: Cloudburst and glacial melt caused 5,000+ deaths.
  - Contributing factors: Hydropower dams, tourism, deforestation amplifying risks.
- **Policy Framework:** National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC, 2008); Himalayan Mission; NDMA guidelines on GLOFs (2020). However, gaps in real-time monitoring persist.
- **Global Context:** Similar issues in Andes and Alps; UN's Cryosphere Initiative (2023) calls for global monitoring.

## Implications

- **Environmental:** Accelerated glacial melt threatens water security for 1.9 billion people reliant on Himalayan rivers; risks biodiversity loss and ecosystem shifts.
- **Disaster Risk:** Increased frequency of flash floods, landslides; potential for transboundary impacts (e.g., India-China border rivers).
- **Socio-Economic:** Affects livelihoods in hill states (agriculture, tourism); infrastructure damage (e.g., hydropower worth ₹12,000 crore in 2025 flood); migration from vulnerable areas.
- **Policy and Governance:** Pushes for integrating space tech into DRR; strengthens calls for sustainable development in Himalayas (e.g., restricting mega-projects).
- **For India:**



- **Water Security:** Glacial melt alters river flows, impacting irrigation and hydropower (e.g., Ganga basin).
- **Internal Security:** Floods exacerbate border vulnerabilities in Uttarakhand/Arunachal.
- **Economic:** Annual disaster losses ~₹50,000 crore; insurance and reconstruction burdens.
- **International:** Opportunities for collaboration via SAARC or BIMSTEC on trans-Himalayan monitoring.

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## UPSC CSE State PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: GLOF, Cryosphere, Deglaciation, ISRO Satellites (Cartosat, Resourcesat), IPCC.
- Data: Himalayan glaciers ~9,000; 2025 Chamoli flood deaths (200+); Warming rate (1.5x global).
- Related: Bhuvan Portal, NAPCC Missions.

### GS-1 (Geography)

- Himalayan geomorphology and disaster vulnerabilities.
- Climate change impacts on physical features.

### GS-3 (Environment & Disaster Management)

- Role of space technology in environmental monitoring.
- Climate resilience and DRR strategies.

### GS-3 (Science & Tech)

- ISRO's contributions to earth observation.

### Essay / Interview

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- “Climate Change in the Himalayas: From Melting Glaciers to Flash Floods - Challenges for India's Disaster Preparedness.”
- “Leveraging Space Technology for Sustainable Development: Lessons from ISRO's Glacial Studies.”

## MCQs

1. With reference to the ISRO study on Himalayan glaciers (2025), consider the following statements:
2. Exposed ice patches indicate ongoing deglaciation and increase flood risks.
3. The study focused on the Srikanta Glacier in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district.
4. Satellite imagery from Cartosat was used to detect pre-flood indicators.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (d)**

2. The 2025 flash flood analyzed in the ISRO study occurred in:

- (a) Himachal Pradesh
- (b) Sikkim
- (c) Uttarakhand
- (d) Arunachal Pradesh

**Answer: (c)**



3. Which of the following is NOT a cryospheric indicator mentioned in the study for flood prediction?

- (a) Exposed ice patches
- (b) Thinned glacier cover
- (c) Seasonal snow melt
- (d) River sedimentation

**Answer: (d)**

4. The Himalayan region is warming at a rate:

- (a) Equal to the global average
- (b) 0.5 times the global average
- (c) 1.5 times the global average
- (d) 2.5 times the global average

**Answer: (c)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "Exposed ice patches on melting glaciers are emerging as key indicators of flash flood risks in the Himalayas." Discuss the findings of the ISRO study and their implications for disaster management in India. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the role of satellite technology in monitoring cryospheric changes. How can ISRO's observations enhance India's climate resilience? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Climate-induced glacial retreats pose multifaceted threats to Himalayan states." Examine the socio-economic and environmental impacts, suggesting mitigation strategies. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Satellite Eyes to Ground Realities: Addressing Himalayan Flood Vulnerabilities in the Era of Climate Change."



## U.S. Strikes Iran's Kharg Island Oil Terminal; Iran Retaliates with Gulf Attacks

### Why in News?

- ❖ On 15 March 2026, the United States conducted airstrikes on Iran's Kharg Island, the country's primary oil export terminal in the Persian Gulf, targeting infrastructure to disrupt Tehran's oil shipments amid escalating tensions.
- ❖ Iran retaliated swiftly, launching missile and drone attacks on U.S. naval assets, including amphibious ships in the Gulf, and warned of abandoning all restraint, potentially leading to attacks on southern marine islands.
- ❖ U.S. President Donald Trump, while aboard a command ship, stated the strikes did not target oil infrastructure directly but should deter Iran from interfering with the Strait of Hormuz.
- ❖ Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf warned that such actions could lead to social media-fueled unrest. The strikes have heightened fears of a broader war, with oil prices surging to \$105/bbl and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz affecting 20% of global oil transit. This marks a new phase in the US-Iran conflict, following Khamenei's killing, with implications for global energy markets and regional stability.

### Key Details of the Escalation

- **U.S. Strikes on Kharg Island:**
  - Targets: Oil export terminal, handling most of Iran's crude shipments; white-hulled military sites; economic and energy facilities linked to oil.
  - Method: Airstrikes from U.S. carriers in the Gulf; no direct hits on oil pipelines claimed, but disruptions reported.
  - Casualties/Damage: Iranian reports of 25+ deaths, including civilians; fires at facilities; export halted temporarily.
  - Trump's Statement: Aboard USS command ship, he said strikes were to "reconsider this decision" and prevent Iran from closing the Strait; emphasized no intent to target oil but to send a message.

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- **Iran's Retaliation:**

- Targets: U.S. amphibious ships (e.g., USS Tripoli), naval mine storage; attacks in UAE waters (Fujairah, hours after U.S. strikes).
- Method: Ballistic missiles, drones; joint military command cited three Central Command sites.
- Casualties/Damage: U.S. reports minimal damage, but Iran claims hits on naval facilities and bunkers; multiple strikes reported.
- Warnings: Iran threatens to abandon restraint, attack islands (e.g., southern marine islands); could target U.S. allies like UAE/Saudi.

- **Regional Involvement:**

- UAE: Smoke from energy installation in Fujairah; U.S. strikes originated from here.
- Saudi Arabia/Oman: On alert; Iran warns of strikes through the Strait if Hormuz is threatened.
- Other: Iranian forces targeted infrastructure in the Gulf; U.S. deployed more ships post-strike.

- **Economic Fallout:** Brent crude at \$105/bbl (+5%); shipping through Hormuz disrupted; global energy markets volatile.

- **Leadership Responses:** Trump: "Will immediately reconsider"; Iran's Ghalibaf: Could lead to social unrest; military vows hits on U.S. homeland if escalated.

## **Background: Roots of the Crisis**

- **US-Iran Tensions:** Stem from JCPOA withdrawal (2018); escalated with Soleimani killing (2020), Khamenei's assassination (Feb 2026), and mutual strikes. U.S. "maximum pressure" under Trump 2.0 targets Iran's economy.
- **Kharg Island's Strategic Importance:** Handles 90% of Iran's oil exports (2.5 million bpd pre-sanctions); located in the Gulf, vulnerable to attacks; previous incidents include 1980s Iran-Iraq War bombings.

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- **Previous Escalations (2026):** Iran's missile barrages on U.S./Israel (Feb); U.S.-Israel airstrikes on nuclear sites; proxy wars involving Hezbollah/Houthis. Strait of Hormuz threats recurrent since 2019 tanker seizures.
- **Proxy and Alliance Dynamics:** Iran backs Axis of Resistance; U.S. allies (Israel, Gulf states via Abraham Accords) counter. Recent: U.S. naval deployments in Gulf (Jan 2026) amid Hormuz blockade fears.
- **Global Context:** Oil dependency (Iran's economy 40% oil-reliant); IAEA reports on Iran's nuclear advances; UNSC resolutions on Gulf security ignored.

## Implications

- **For West Asia:** Risk of full-scale Gulf war; potential Iranian attacks on Saudi/UAE oil fields; humanitarian crisis with refugee flows; spillover to Iraq/Syria.
- **Global Economy:** Oil spikes could hit \$120+/bbl; inflation in importers (Europe/Asia); supply chain disruptions via Hormuz (20% oil, 25% LNG).
- **Nuclear and Security Risks:** Iran may accelerate nuclear program; U.S. could target more sites; cyber/escalatory attacks possible.
- **Geopolitical Shifts:** Strains U.S.-China ties (China imports Iranian oil); Russia may support Iran; weakens global non-proliferation efforts.
- **For India:**
  - **Energy Security:** 85% oil imports via Gulf; price surge adds ₹60,000 crore/month to bill; CAD widens 2%.
  - **Diaspora and Trade:** 9 million in Gulf at risk; Chabahar port operations halted; INSTC disrupted.
  - **Strategic:** Navy deployments for SLOC protection; balancing U.S. ties with Iran (oil waivers).
  - **Economic:** Remittances (\$100 bn/year) threatened; stock markets down 7%.



## UPSC CSE & STATE PCS Relevance

### 5. Prelims

- Key terms: Strait of Hormuz, Kharg Island, Abraham Accords, JCPOA.
- Data: Hormuz transit (20% oil); Iran's oil exports (2.5 mn bpd); Khamenei killing (Feb 2026).
- Related: Persian Gulf geography, IAEA.

### GS-2 (IR)

- US-Iran dynamics and India's multi-alignment.
- Regional conflicts and global alliances.

### GS-3 (Economy)

- Oil volatility impacts on CAD/inflation/energy security.
- Chokepoints like Hormuz.

### GS-3 (Security)

- Proxy wars, maritime security in Gulf.

### Essay / Interview

- “Escalating US-Iran Tensions: From Oil Strikes to Regional War - Implications for Global Energy and India's Strategic Choices.”
- “The Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz in West Asian Geopolitics.”

## MCQs

1. With reference to the US strikes on Kharg Island (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. Kharg Island handles the majority of Iran's crude oil exports.
3. Iran retaliated by targeting U.S. amphibious ships in the Persian Gulf.



4. The strikes were aimed at disrupting Iran's nuclear facilities.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (b)**

2. The Strait of Hormuz is a critical chokepoint connecting:

- (a) Red Sea and Mediterranean
- (b) Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman
- (c) Black Sea and Aegean Sea
- (d) Caspian Sea and Arabian Sea

**Answer: (b)**

3. Which U.S. President is associated with the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran in the ongoing conflict?

- (a) Joe Biden
- (b) Barack Obama
- (c) Donald Trump
- (d) George Bush

**Answer: (c)**

4. Kharg Island is located in:

- (a) Strait of Malacca



- (b) Persian Gulf
- (c) Gulf of Aden
- (d) Bab el-Mandeb

**Answer: (b)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "The U.S. bombing of Kharg Island marks a dangerous escalation in West Asia." Discuss the geopolitical drivers and global implications for energy security. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse Iran's retaliatory strategies in the Gulf and their impact on regional alliances. How does this affect India's interests? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Attacks on oil infrastructure like Kharg Island threaten global economic stability." Examine the statement in the context of the March 2026 events and suggest India's policy responses. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Proxy Wars to Direct Strikes: The US-Iran Conflict Over Oil and Power - Challenges for International Order and India's Role."

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## Gig Workers Hit by LPG Shortage in Bengaluru

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### Why in News?

- ❖ An acute shortage of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) in Bengaluru has severely impacted the gig economy, particularly food delivery workers associated with platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, and Uber Eats.
- ❖ Over the past three days (as of 15 March 2026), restaurants have scaled down operations or shut temporarily due to lack of cooking gas, leading to a 50-70% drop in delivery orders. Workers report daily earnings plummeting from ₹500-₹700 to ₹200-₹300, with peak-hour orders (lunch/dinner) most affected. This crisis highlights vulnerabilities in the informal sector amid supply chain disruptions, prompting calls for government intervention.



- ❖ The Karnataka government has assured swift resolution by diverting supplies from neighboring states, but unions like the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) demand relief measures.
- ❖ Amid broader energy shortages (linked to global oil volatility from West Asia conflict), this event underscores gig workers' precarity, affecting over 1 lakh delivery personnel in Bengaluru alone.

## Key Details of the Crisis

### • LPG Shortage Impact on Restaurants:

- Many commercial LPG cylinders unavailable; restaurants (especially small/medium ones) have cut operations by 30-35 deliveries/day or shut completely.
- Peak outages during lunch/dinner hours; some shifted to electric alternatives, but costs prohibitive.
- Example: A restaurant in Indiranagar reported completing only 30 orders/day against usual 130, with curtailed menu (no gas-intensive items).

### • Gig Workers' Plight:

- Earnings Drop: 50% to 70% reduction; e.g., Abdul Razak (delivery worker) earned ₹200 in two days vs. usual ₹500-₹700/day.
- Order Volume: From 10-15 orders/day to 3-5; idle time increased, forcing workers to consider alternatives like providing relief or switching apps.
- Affected Platforms: Swiggy, Zomato, Dunzo; workers face fuel costs without commensurate incentives.

### • Causes of Shortage:

- Supply Chain Disruptions: Delays in refilling from Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) depots; linked to global oil price spikes (\$105/bbl) from West Asia escalation.
- Demand Surge: Post-winter increase in commercial usage; hoarding reported.



- Government Response: Karnataka Energy Minister assured supplies within 48 hours; helplines activated; priority to essential services.
- **Worker Responses and Demands:**
  - Protests: Small gatherings by gig workers near IOC offices.
  - Demands: Compensation from platforms (e.g., minimum guarantee pay); government subsidies for gig workers; faster LPG distribution.
  - Broader Context: Over 1 lakh gig workers in Bengaluru; national gig economy employs 1.5 crore (NITI Aayog estimates).
- **Economic Snapshot:** Daily loss to gig workers estimated at ₹5-10 crore in Bengaluru; ripple effects on urban consumption.

## Background: Roots of the Issue

- **Gig Economy in India:** Emerged post-2010 with platforms like Uber (2013), Swiggy (2014); employs 1.5 crore workers (2025 NITI Aayog report), contributing 1.25% to GDP. Vulnerable to external shocks (e.g., COVID-19 lockdowns, fuel hikes).
- **LPG Supply Chain:** India imports 50% of LPG; managed by PSUs like IOC, BPCL. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (2016) boosted domestic access, but commercial shortages recur due to global volatility (e.g., 2022 Ukraine war). Recent West Asia conflict (2026) exacerbated prices/supply.
- **Previous Crises:** 2023 fuel shortage in Delhi affected cab drivers; 2024 Bengaluru water crisis hit delivery timelines. Gig workers' issues highlighted in Social Security Code, 2020, but implementation lags (e.g., no universal minimum wage).
- **Policy Framework:** Gig Workers Welfare Bills in states like Rajasthan (2023), Karnataka (2024); e-Shram portal for registration. However, lack of insurance/unemployment benefits persists.
- **Urban Vulnerabilities:** Bengaluru's rapid urbanization (tech hub) amplifies supply chain strains; similar issues in Mumbai, Delhi amid energy transitions.



## Implications

- **For Gig Workers:** Increased financial distress; potential migration to other jobs; health risks from prolonged idling/exposure. Long-term: Push for unionization and better platform policies.
- **Economic:** Disruptions in food delivery sector (₹1 lakh crore market); inflation in urban food prices; broader gig economy slowdown amid energy crises.
- **Social:** Highlights inequality in informal sector (90% workforce); gender impacts (women in delivery rising); potential unrest if prolonged.
- **Policy and Governance:** Tests state-centre coordination on energy; accelerates calls for Gig Economy Act; integration with Atmanirbhar Bharat for supply resilience.
- **For India:**
  - **Energy Security:** Exposes import dependence; boosts renewable push (e.g., electric kitchens).
  - **Urban Planning:** Need for robust infrastructure in metros; links to SDGs 8 (decent work), 7 (affordable energy).
  - **Labour Reforms:** Urges enforcement of Social Security Code; NITI Aayog's gig platform ratings.
  - **Global Ties:** Influenced by West Asia oil dynamics; impacts forex reserves.

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## UPSC CSE & STATE PCS Relevance

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## Prelims

- Key terms: Gig Economy, LPG Supply Chain, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Social Security Code 2020.
- Data: Gig workers in India (1.5 crore); Bengaluru gig delivery personnel (1 lakh+); LPG import dependence (50%).
- Related: NITI Aayog, e-Shram Portal.

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## GS-2 (Governance & Social Justice)

- Labour reforms for informal sector.
- Centre-state relations in energy distribution.

## GS-3 (Economy)

- Gig economy contributions and vulnerabilities.
- Energy security and supply chain disruptions.

**GS-3 (Internal Security)** - Marginal: Potential for urban unrest from economic distress.

## Essay / Interview

- “The Gig Economy in India: Opportunities and Vulnerabilities Amid External Shocks.”
- “Energy Shortages and Their Ripple Effects on Urban Livelihoods: Lessons from Bengaluru's LPG Crisis.”

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## MCQs

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1. With reference to the LPG shortage in Bengaluru (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. It led to a 50-70% drop in daily earnings for food delivery gig workers.
3. The crisis is linked to global oil price spikes from West Asia conflicts.
4. Gig workers in Bengaluru number over 1 lakh.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3



**Answer: (d)**

2. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana primarily aims to:

- (a) Promote electric vehicles
- (b) Provide LPG connections to BPL households
- (c) Subsidize commercial LPG
- (d) Develop renewable energy

**Answer: (b)**

3. Which of the following is NOT a major food delivery platform affected by the Bengaluru LPG crisis?

- (a) Swiggy
- (b) Zomato
- (c) Uber Eats
- (d) Ola Cabs

**Answer: (d)**

4. The gig economy in India employs approximately:

- (a) 50 lakh workers
- (b) 1.5 crore workers
- (c) 5 crore workers
- (d) 10 crore workers

**Answer: (b)**



## Mains Questions

1. "External shocks like energy shortages expose the vulnerabilities of India's gig economy." Discuss in the context of the March 2026 Bengaluru LPG crisis and suggest measures for worker protection. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the role of supply chain disruptions in affecting urban livelihoods. How can policies like the Social Security Code address such issues? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "The gig economy's growth must be balanced with social security nets." Examine the statement with reference to recent crises and recommend reforms. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Gig Workers in Modern India: Navigating Economic Opportunities Amid Precarious Realities and Policy Gaps."

## West Asia Conflict Hits Indian Aviation: Closed Airspace, Detours Spike Fuel Costs for Airlines

### Why in News?

- The ongoing conflict in West Asia, particularly the US-Israel-Iran war, has led to the closure of key airspaces over Iran, Iraq, Syria, and parts of the Gulf, forcing Indian airlines to take longer detours for flights to the Gulf, Europe, and the US.
- This has resulted in a 60% surge in Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices per kilolitre, eroding profit margins and increasing operational costs by 10-12% for carriers like Air India, IndiGo, and Vistara.
- Routes that typically took 2-3 hours now extend by 30-60 minutes, with fuel consumption rising sharply. As of 16 March 2026, the Civil Aviation Ministry has urged international bodies like ICAO for safe corridors, but threats persist amid Iranian missile risks.
- This crisis, the worst since the 2020 COVID-19 disruptions, highlights India's aviation vulnerability to geopolitical tensions, affecting 40% of international flights. With ATF accounting for 40% of airline costs, the sector faces unprecedented losses estimated at ₹5,000 crore quarterly, prompting calls for government subsidies and route optimizations.



## Key Details of the Crisis

- **Airspace Closures and Detours:**

- Affected Regions: Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian, and partial Jordanian/Saudi airspaces closed due to missile threats and military activity.
- Impact on Routes: Gulf-bound flights (e.g., to Dubai, Abu Dhabi) detour south via Oman or north over Central Asia; Europe/US routes avoid Gulf, adding 500-1,000 km.
- Examples: Delhi-Dubai now 3.5 hours (up from 3); Mumbai-London extended by 45 minutes. Some US services (e.g., Air India to New York) reroute over Pakistan (if open) or Pacific.
- Airlines Affected: IndiGo (largest Gulf operator), Air India (Europe/US focus), Vistara/SpiceJet (regional routes).

- **Fuel and Economic Impact:**

- ATF Price Surge: Up 60% to ₹1,20,000 per kilolitre in major cities (Delhi/Mumbai), linked to global oil at \$105/bbl from Hormuz disruptions.
- Cost Increase: Fuel now 40% of ops costs (up from 30%); per-flight fuel burn rises 10-15% due to detours.
- Operational Challenges: Higher crew fatigue, maintenance costs; cancellations (5-10% on Gulf routes); passenger fares up 15-20%.
- Quarterly Losses: Industry estimates ₹5,000-₹7,000 crore; low earnings per passenger (down 10%) amid competition.

- **Government and Industry Response:**

- DGCA Directives: Mandated risk assessments; coordination with IATA for alternative routes.
- Airline Measures: Fuel hedging (limited success); reduced frequencies to Gulf; partnerships for codeshares.

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- International: ICAO/FAO urged for "safe corridors"; India seeks bilateral talks with Gulf states.
- Broader Effects: Cargo delays (e.g., perishables to Gulf); tourism hit (Indian diaspora travel).
- **Current Status (16 March 2026):** Iranian threats to shoot down overflying aircraft; Pakistani airspace partially open but volatile; EU/US airlines similarly affected but with fewer Gulf dependencies.

## Background: Roots of the Issue

- **West Asia Conflict Timeline:** Began with Khamenei's killing (Feb 2026), escalating to US strikes on Kharg Island (March 2026) and Iranian retaliations; airspace closures since late Feb amid missile barrages. Parallels to 1991 Gulf War closures.
- **India's Aviation Sector:** World's third-largest (post-2024 growth); heavy Gulf reliance (60% international traffic); UDAN scheme boosted domestic, but international vulnerable. ATF deregulated since 2002, tied to global crude.
- **Previous Disruptions:** 2019 Iran-US tensions closed routes briefly; 2022 Ukraine war spiked ATF 50%; COVID-19 grounded 90% fleet. Geopolitical risks highlighted in NITI Aayog's 2025 Aviation Report.
- **Policy Framework:** Aviation Policy 2016; NCAP 2024 for sustainability; but no dedicated geopolitical contingency fund. Global: Chicago Convention (1944) on airspace sovereignty; ICAO standards ignored in conflicts.
- **Economic Ties:** India imports 85% oil via Gulf; 9 million diaspora in region; aviation contributes 1.5% GDP (₹2 lakh crore).

## Implications

- **For Aviation Sector:** Potential bankruptcies for low-cost carriers; job losses (2 lakh employees); shift to sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) accelerated but costly.
- **Economic:** Inflation from higher fares/freight; tourism/GDP dip (aviation multiplier effect 3x); CAD pressure from fuel imports.



- **Strategic and Security:** Exposes SLOC/air route vulnerabilities; Navy/Air Force on alert for evacuations; cyber risks to aviation systems.
- **Environmental:** Higher emissions from detours (10% more CO<sub>2</sub>); counters India's net-zero 2070 goal.
- **For India:**
  - **Energy/Trade:** Gulf disruptions amplify oil shocks; alternatives like Russian crude strained.
  - **Diaspora:** Evacuation ops (like Vande Bharat) prepared; remittances (\$100 bn/year) at risk.
  - **Foreign Policy:** Tests multi-alignment (US ties vs. Iran/Russia); push for BRICS aviation forum.
  - **Social:** Urban job losses; gender impact (women in cabin crew rising).

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## UPSC CSE & STATE PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: ATF, ICAO, Chicago Convention, UDAN Scheme, Strait of Hormuz.
- Data: Aviation contribution to GDP (1.5%); Gulf diaspora (9 million); ATF share in costs (40%).
- Related: NCAP 2016, NITI Aayog.

### GS-2 (IR)

- Geopolitical impacts on India's foreign policy.
- Bilateral/multilateral aviation agreements.

### GS-3 (Economy)

- Infrastructure vulnerabilities; energy security.
- Aviation sector reforms.

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## GS-3 (Environment)

- Conflict-induced emissions; sustainable aviation.

## Essay / Interview

- “Geopolitical Conflicts and Economic Disruptions: The Case of West Asia's Impact on India's Aviation Sector.”
- “Balancing Growth and Resilience: Challenges for Indian Airlines in a Volatile Global Landscape.”

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## MCQs

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1. With reference to the impact of West Asia conflict on Indian aviation (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. ATF prices have surged by 60% per kilolitre due to oil volatility.
3. Gulf routes now avoid Iranian airspace, adding 30-60 minutes to flight times.
4. Fuel accounts for about 40% of airline operational costs.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (d)**

2. The Chicago Convention of 1944 primarily deals with:
  - (a) Maritime trade routes
  - (b) International civil aviation
  - (c) Nuclear non-proliferation



(d) Climate change mitigation

**Answer: (b)**

3. Which scheme aims to enhance regional air connectivity in India?

(a) Make in India

(b) UDAN

(c) Digital India

(d) Swachh Bharat

**Answer: (b)**

4. The Strait of Hormuz is critical for India's:

(a) Coal imports

(b) Oil imports

(c) Textile exports

(d) IT services

**Answer: (b)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "Geopolitical tensions in West Asia pose significant challenges to India's aviation sector." Discuss the impacts and suggest measures for resilience. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the role of international bodies like ICAO in managing airspace closures during conflicts. How does this affect developing economies like India? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Rising fuel costs from global conflicts threaten India's economic growth." Examine in the context of the 2026 West Asia crisis and propose policy interventions. (15 marks / 250 words)



4. **Essay (250 marks)** “From Closed Skies to Economic Turbulence: The Ripple Effects of West Asian Conflicts on India's Infrastructure and Trade.”

## Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (ECA)

### Why in News?

- ❖ Amid the ongoing LPG shortage in Bengaluru and surging global oil prices (\$105/bbl) due to the West Asia conflict, the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs on 15 March 2026 indicated plans to invoke provisions of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (ECA) to regulate prices, prevent hoarding, and ensure equitable distribution of essential fuels like LPG and petroleum products.
- ❖ This comes as gig workers and urban households face disruptions, with calls from states like Karnataka for central intervention. The ECA, a key tool for price control during crises, was last significantly amended in 2020 (via the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act), but recent economic pressures have revived debates on its efficacy.
- ❖ Consumer rights groups and opposition parties (e.g., Congress) have urged stricter enforcement, while industry bodies warn against over-regulation stifling supply. This development underscores India's vulnerability to global energy shocks, affecting food security, inflation, and supply chains, with potential notifications under ECA expected soon.

### Key Details of the Act and Recent Context

- **Core Provisions of ECA, 1955:**
  - **Objective:** To ensure availability of essential commodities at fair prices by controlling production, supply, distribution, trade, and commerce. Prevents inflationary trends, hoarding, and black-marketing.
  - **Essential Commodities:** Include foodstuffs (cereals, pulses, edible oils), drugs, fertilizers, petroleum products (LPG, kerosene, diesel), yarns, and raw materials (e.g., jute). List can be amended via notifications.
  - **Government Powers:** Centre/state can fix stock limits, regulate prices, mandate licenses for dealers, seize hoarded goods, and impose penalties (up to 7 years



imprisonment under 2020 amendments for serious violations). No price controls unless "extraordinary circumstances" (e.g., war, famine, natural calamities).

- Amendments: 2020 changes removed cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onions, potatoes from routine regulation (to boost agri-trade), but allowed re-imposition if prices rise 100% (perishables) or 50% (non-perishables).

- **Recent Triggers (2026):**

- **LPG Shortage:** Bengaluru crisis (50-70% drop in supplies) linked to import delays and West Asia disruptions; similar issues in Delhi, Mumbai.
- **Oil Volatility:** Hormuz threats spiked prices; ECA invocation eyed for petroleum to cap retail rates.
- **Government Actions:** Ministry to notify stock limits on LPG cylinders for commercial users; raids on hoarders in 5 states; integration with PM Ujjwala for subsidized access.
- **Penalties and Enforcement:** Over 200 cases filed in 2025-26 for hoarding; EC Act empowers Essential Commodities Inspectors.
- **Criticisms:** Farmers' groups argue 2020 amendments favored corporates; recent calls for rollback amid inflation (8% CPI).

- **Economic Data:** Essential commodities form 45% of CPI basket; LPG imports (50% of demand) cost ₹1.2 lakh crore annually; hoarding incidents up 30% in 2026.

## Background: Roots of the Act

- **Historical Context:** Enacted in 1955 amid post-Independence food shortages; inspired by Defence of India Rules (WWII-era). Aimed at war-time controls but retained for peacetime crises (e.g., 1960s droughts, 1970s oil shocks).
- **Key Amendments and Evolutions:**
  - 1980s: Expanded to drugs amid health crises.
  - 2000s: Liberalized for globalization, but re-tightened during 2008 financial crisis.

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- 2020 Amendment: Part of farm reforms (later repealed in 2021, but ECA changes retained); shifted from routine to exceptional regulation to encourage investment.
- Judicial Interventions: Supreme Court (e.g., 2015 ruling) upheld ECA's constitutionality but stressed proportionality; recent PILs on enforcement gaps.
- **Related Laws:** Prevention of Black Marketing Act, 1980; Food Security Act, 2013; integrates with Competition Act, 2002, to check monopolies.
- **Global Parallels:** Similar to U.S. Defense Production Act or EU's supply chain regulations; India's ECA criticized for being outdated in a market economy.
- **Challenges:** Implementation varies by states (Concurrent List); corruption in inspections; balance between control and free trade.

## Implications

- **Economic:** Stabilizes prices but may deter investments (e.g., storage infrastructure); reduces inflation but risks shortages if over-regulated. Amid 2026 crises, could save ₹10,000 crore in subsidies.
- **Social:** Ensures access for vulnerable groups (BPL households via Ujjwala); prevents exploitation during disasters; but urban-rural divide in enforcement.
- **Agricultural/Industrial:** Farmers benefit from stable inputs (fertilizers) but face export curbs; industries (e.g., food processing) gain supply security.
- **Federalism:** Centre-state tensions (states like Tamil Nadu seek more powers); aligns with Cooperative Federalism via consultations.
- **For India:**
  - **Food/Energy Security:** Critical amid climate change (droughts) and geopolitics (West Asia); links to SDGs 2 (zero hunger) and 7 (affordable energy).
  - **Inflation Control:** ECA helped cap onion prices in 2025; now eyed for fuels amid CAD pressures (widening 2%).



- **Governance:** Boosts consumer protection (via Consumer Protection Act, 2019); but needs digitization (e.g., e-inspections).
- **Global Trade:** WTO-compatible but scrutiny on export bans (e.g., wheat in 2022).

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## UPSC CSE STATE PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: Essential Commodities Act, 1955; Hoarding, Black-marketing; PM Ujjwala Yojana; CPI Basket.
- Data: 2020 Amendment thresholds (50%/100% price rise); Imprisonment (up to 7 years).
- Related: Concurrent List (Entry 33), Article 19(1)(g) (trade freedom).

### GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Centre-state relations in economic regulation.
- Consumer rights and welfare schemes.

### GS-3 (Economy)

- Price control mechanisms; inflation and supply chain management.
- Agriculture and food security.

### GS-3 (Internal Security) - Food security as non-traditional threat.

### Essay / Interview

- “The Essential Commodities Act: Balancing Market Freedom and Public Welfare in India's Economy.”
- “Regulatory Interventions like ECA in Times of Crisis: Efficacy and Challenges.”

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## MCQs

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1. With reference to the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, consider the following statements:



2. It allows the government to regulate prices only during extraordinary circumstances like war or famine.
3. The 2020 amendment removed routine stock limits on cereals and pulses.
4. Penalties under the Act include imprisonment up to 7 years for violations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (d)**

2. The Essential Commodities Act falls under which List of the Seventh Schedule?

- (a) Union List
- (b) State List
- (c) Concurrent List
- (d) Residuary Powers

**Answer: (c)**

3. Which of the following is NOT typically classified as an essential commodity under ECA?

- (a) Petroleum products
- (b) Fertilizers
- (c) Electronics
- (d) Edible oils

**Answer: (c)**



4. The 2020 amendment to ECA allows re-imposition of stock limits if prices of non-perishables rise by:

- (a) 25%
- (b) 50%
- (c) 75%
- (d) 100%

**Answer: (b)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "The Essential Commodities Act serves as a double-edged sword in India's economic policy." Critically examine its provisions, amendments, and relevance in addressing contemporary crises like energy shortages. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Discuss the role of ECA in ensuring food and energy security. How do its federal implications affect implementation? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Amendments to ECA reflect the tension between regulation and liberalization." Analyze in the context of the 2020 changes and suggest improvements for modern challenges. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Essential Commodities Act: A Tool for Economic Equity or a Relic of Control Economy? - India's Path to Balanced Regulation."

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## Supreme Court Allows Passive Euthanasia in Harish Rana Case: Landmark Ruling on Right to Die with Dignity

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### Why in News?

- In a landmark judgment on 15 March 2026, the Supreme Court of India permitted passive euthanasia for Harish Rana, a 32-year-old man in a vegetative state for 13 years following a brain injury. This is the first judicial approval for passive euthanasia under the revised guidelines, distinguishing it from active euthanasia.

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- The court ruled that the right to live with dignity (Article 21) includes the right to die with dignity when treatment is irreversible and futile. The decision comes amid ongoing debates on end-of-life care, with the court emphasizing safeguards like medical board approval and family consent.
- It has reignited discussions on euthanasia laws, with bioethicists praising it for compassion, while critics fear misuse. Amid rising cases of prolonged vegetative states (e.g., due to accidents, strokes), the ruling aligns with global trends (e.g., in Belgium, Netherlands) but adapts to India's cultural context. The Ministry of Health has indicated plans to update guidelines, potentially incorporating advance directives more robustly.

## Key Details of the Judgment

- **Case Background (Harish Rana):**
  - Rana, injured in 2013, was in a persistent vegetative state (PVS) with no recovery prospects, as certified by a medical board.
  - Petition by family sought withdrawal of life support (ventilator, feeding tube), arguing prolonged suffering and financial burden.
  - Court Approved: Passive euthanasia via removal of artificial support; emphasized "best interest" test, including patient's prior wishes, family views, and medical futility.
- **Distinction Between Active and Passive Euthanasia:**
  - Passive: Withholding/withdrawing life-sustaining treatment (e.g., ventilator) when futile; now permissible with safeguards.
  - Active: Administering lethal injection to end life; remains illegal (punishable under IPC Section 304/306 as culpable homicide/abatement of suicide).
  - Court's Reasoning: No violation of Article 21; aligns with "dignified death" over prolonged artificial existence.
- **Guidelines Issued/Reiterated:**
  - Multi-step process: Approval from treating doctor, hospital ethics committee, government medical board, and magistrate.



- Advance Directives: Living wills (registered with notary) for future scenarios; mandatory for passive euthanasia without family petition.
- Safeguards: Prevents misuse (e.g., for financial gain); requires informed consent; non-medical factors (e.g., poverty) not considered.
- Timeline: Implementation within 7 days post-approval; monitoring by state health departments.
- **Government Response:** Health Ministry to form expert panel for national guidelines; Law Commission consulted for potential legislation.
- **Statistics:** Over 10,000 PVS cases annually in India (AIIMS data); 2025 saw 50+ petitions, with 20 approved post-2018 framework.

## Background: Roots of the Issue

- **Evolution of Euthanasia Laws in India:**
  - Pre-2011: Illegal; viewed as suicide/abatement (IPC 309/306).
  - Aruna Shanbaug Case (2011): SC allowed passive euthanasia in rare cases but rejected active; nurse in PVS for 42 years, death in 2015.
  - Common Cause vs Union of India (2018): SC legalized passive euthanasia and living wills; recognized right to refuse treatment under Article 21.
  - Law Commission Reports: 196th (2006) recommended legalizing passive; 241st (2012) suggested framework; 262nd (2015) on passive with safeguards.
  - 2026 Harish Rana: First post-2018 case applying streamlined guidelines amid COVID-era rise in neuro-cases.
- **Constitutional Aspects:** Article 21 (right to life) interpreted to include dignified death (e.g., Maneka Gandhi, 1978; Olga Tellis, 1985); balances with Article 14 (equality) to prevent arbitrary decisions.



- **Global Context:** Active euthanasia legal in 10+ countries (e.g., Netherlands since 2002); passive common (e.g., UK, US via DNR orders). India's stance conservative due to cultural/religious views (e.g., Hinduism's ahimsa, karma).
- **Challenges:** Ethical dilemmas (sanctity of life vs. autonomy); medical tourism for euthanasia abroad; gaps in palliative care (only 1% access per WHO).
- **Related Initiatives:** Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 (decriminalized suicide attempts); National Health Policy, 2017 (end-of-life care emphasis).

## Implications

- **Legal and Ethical:** Sets precedent for similar cases; strengthens patient autonomy but risks "slippery slope" to active euthanasia. Enhances living wills' uptake (registered 5,000+ since 2018).
- **Healthcare System:** Pushes for better palliative care (e.g., morphine access); reduces ICU burden (₹50,000/month per PVS patient); trains doctors on ethics.
- **Social:** Addresses elder abuse/financial strain in families; cultural shift from "life at all costs" to quality; gender impact (women often caregivers).
- **Policy and Governance:** May lead to Euthanasia Bill; integrates with Ayushman Bharat for end-of-life coverage; state variations (e.g., Maharashtra's guidelines).
- **For India:**
  - **Health Security:** Amid aging population (15% over 60 by 2030), eases resource allocation; links to SDG 3 (good health).
  - **Judicial Activism:** Reinforces SC's role in social reforms (e.g., like privacy in 2017).
  - **Economic:** Saves public health expenditure (₹10,000 crore annually on prolonged care); but needs investment in hospices.
  - **International:** Aligns India with human rights norms (e.g., UN CRPD on disability dignity).



## UPSC CSE & STATE PSC Relevance

### Prelims

- Key terms: Passive Euthanasia, Active Euthanasia, Living Will, Article 21, Persistent Vegetative State (PVS).
- Data: Aruna Shanbaug (2011); Common Cause (2018); Law Commission Reports (196th, 241st).
- Related: IPC Sections 304/306, Mental Healthcare Act 2017.

### GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Judicial interpretations of Fundamental Rights.
- Health policy and ethical governance.

### GS-4 (Ethics)

- Bioethics: Autonomy vs. Beneficence; euthanasia dilemmas.

### GS-2 (Social Justice)

- End-of-life care for vulnerable groups.

### Essay / Interview

- "The Right to Die with Dignity: Balancing Ethics, Law, and Compassion in India."
- "Judicial Activism in Healthcare: From Euthanasia to Public Health Reforms."

## MCQs

1. With reference to the Supreme Court's ruling on euthanasia (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. The Harish Rana case marks the first judicial approval for passive euthanasia in India.
3. Passive euthanasia involves withholding life-sustaining treatment, while active involves administering lethal substances.



4. The right to die with dignity is derived from Article 21 of the Constitution.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (c)**

2. In which landmark case did the Supreme Court first allow passive euthanasia in exceptional circumstances?

- (a) Common Cause vs Union of India (2018)
- (b) Aruna Shanbaug vs Union of India (2011)
- (c) Harish Rana Case (2026)
- (d) Gian Kaur vs State of Punjab (1996)

**Answer: (b)**

3. Under the guidelines for passive euthanasia, which of the following is NOT a required approval?

- (a) Hospital Ethics Committee
- (b) Government Medical Board
- (c) Supreme Court Bench
- (d) Magistrate

**Answer: (c)**

4. The Law Commission's 196th Report (2006) primarily recommended:

- (a) Legalizing active euthanasia



- (b) Decriminalizing suicide attempts
- (c) Framework for passive euthanasia
- (d) Banning living wills

**Answer: (c)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "The Supreme Court's decision on passive euthanasia reflects a nuanced balance between the sanctity of life and individual dignity." Discuss in light of the Harish Rana case and its implications for India's legal framework. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the evolution of euthanasia laws in India, highlighting key judicial interventions and ethical challenges. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Passive euthanasia addresses humanitarian concerns but requires robust safeguards against misuse." Analyze the statement and suggest measures to strengthen end-of-life care policies. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Right to Dignified Death: Ethical, Legal, and Social Dimensions in Contemporary India."

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## US Strikes Kharg Island: Iran's Key Oil Export Hub Targeted, Threatening Global Energy Markets

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### Why in News?

- ❖ The United States conducted a targeted strike on Kharg Island, Iran's primary oil export terminal in the Persian Gulf, on 15 March 2026, amid the escalating West Asia conflict. Kharg Island, handling up to 90% of Iran's crude oil exports (1.3-1.6 million barrels per day pre-sanctions), was hit, potentially disrupting global oil supplies and pumping up prices further (Brent crude at \$105/bbl).
- ❖ Iranian officials condemned the attack as a "cowardly act," vowing retaliation, while US President Donald Trump stated it was to prevent Iran from closing the Strait of Hormuz.

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This marks a critical escalation following Khamenei's killing (Feb 2026) and prior strikes, highlighting vulnerabilities in global energy chokepoints.

- ❖ The attack has raised fears of a broader Gulf shutdown, affecting 20% of world oil transit. India, reliant on Gulf imports, has expressed concerns via the MEA, urging de-escalation. Amid oil volatility, this event underscores energy security risks, with OPEC+ monitoring and UNSC calling for restraint.

## Key Details of the Incident

- **Kharg Island's Strategic Profile:**

- Location: 20 km from Iran's coast in the Persian Gulf; Iran's largest oil terminal since the 1960s.
- Capacity: Exports 1.3-1.6 million barrels/day (pre-2018 sanctions); handles 90% of Iran's crude via pipelines from mainland fields.
- Infrastructure: Deep-water ports, storage tanks (over 30 million barrels capacity), loading arms for supertankers; connected to mainland via undersea pipelines.
- Historical Role: Oil discovered in 1959; developed post-1979 Revolution; survived Iran-Iraq War bombings (1980s).

- **US Strike Details:**

- Targets: Oil loading facilities, storage tanks, and military assets; no complete destruction claimed, but fires and disruptions reported.
- Method: Airstrikes from US carriers; part of "maximum pressure" campaign.
- Casualties/Damage: Iranian reports 15-20 deaths, partial shutdown; exports halted for 48+ hours.
- US Justification: To deter Iranian threats to Hormuz; Trump: "Will not allow the Gulf to close."

- **Iranian Response:**

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- Vowed "decisive countermeasures"; potential attacks on US assets or allies (e.g., UAE ports).
- Economic Hit: Loss of \$50-70 million/day in exports; further sanctions evasion challenged.
- **Global Impact:**
  - Oil Prices: Immediate 5% spike; could reach \$120/bbl if prolonged.
  - Shipping: Tankers rerouted; insurance premiums up 20%; Gulf states (Saudi, UAE) on alert.
  - Related Events: Follows Iran's retaliation on US ships (earlier March); proxy strikes in Iraq/Syria.
- **India's Stance:** MEA called for "immediate de-escalation"; Navy patrols enhanced in Arabian Sea; oil PSUs (IOCL) sourcing alternatives from Russia/Venezuela.

## Background: Roots of the Crisis

- **Kharg Island's Evolution:** Ancient site (mentioned in Persian texts); oil exploration began 1959; became export hub post-Shah era. Survived 1980s "Tanker War"; modernized in 2010s despite sanctions. Handles exports to Asia (China, India pre-2019).
- **US-Iran Conflict Timeline:** JCPOA withdrawal (2018); Soleimani killing (2020); Khamenei assassination (Feb 2026); mutual missile strikes. Kharg targeted to cripple Iran's economy (oil 40% GDP).
- **Geopolitical Chokepoints:** Strait of Hormuz (20% global oil); Kharg's vulnerability exposed in past (e.g., 2019 drone attacks on Saudi Aramco). Abraham Accords (2020) aligned Gulf states against Iran.
- **India's Energy Ties:** Pre-sanctions, Iran supplied 10% of India's oil; Chabahar port (Iran) key for INSTC; US waivers lapsed in 2019, forcing diversification.
- **International Frameworks:** OPEC+ quotas ignored amid sanctions; UNCLOS (1982) on maritime security; IAEA concerns on Iran's nuclear program fueling tensions.



## Implications

- **For West Asia:** Potential full closure of Hormuz; escalation to multi-state war (involving Saudi/UAE); humanitarian risks (refugees, shortages).
- **Global Economy:** Oil shock could trigger recession; inflation in Europe/Asia; supply chains disrupted (e.g., LNG from Qatar).
- **Energy Security:** Accelerates shift to renewables; Russia/China may fill Iran's export gap, altering alliances.
- **Environmental:** Oil spills risk from damaged facilities; higher emissions from rerouted shipping.

## For India:

- **Energy Shock:** 85% oil imports via Gulf; bill surge ₹70,000 crore/month; inflation up 2-3%.
- **Economic:** CAD widens 1.5%; stock markets volatile (Sensex down 5%); remittances from Gulf diaspora threatened.
- **Strategic:** Chabahar ops at risk; enhanced IOR Navy presence; diplomatic push via QUAD/BRICS for stability.
- **Social:** Fuel price hikes hit transport, food costs; gig economy (e.g., delivery workers) affected.

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## UPSC CSE & STATE PCS Relevance

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## Prelims

- Key terms: Kharg Island, Strait of Hormuz, JCPOA, Abraham Accords, OPEC+.
- Data: Iran's oil exports (90% via Kharg); Hormuz transit (20% global oil); India's Gulf imports (85%).
- Related: INSTC, Chabahar Port.

## GS-2 (IR)

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- US-Iran dynamics; India's energy diplomacy.
- Multilateral forums (UNSC, IAEA) in conflicts.

## GS-3 (Economy)

- Oil chokepoints and CAD/inflation impacts.
- Energy transition strategies.

## GS-3 (Security)

- Maritime security; proxy wars in Gulf.

## Essay / Interview

- "Strategic Vulnerabilities of Energy Chokepoints: Lessons from the Kharg Island Strike."
- "West Asia Conflicts and India's Energy Security: Navigating Geopolitical Risks."

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## MCQs

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1. With reference to Kharg Island (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. It handles approximately 90% of Iran's crude oil exports.
3. The island is located in the Strait of Hormuz.
4. The recent US strike aims to prevent Iran from disrupting global oil supplies.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: (b)**

2. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with:



- (a) Red Sea
- (b) Gulf of Oman
- (c) Arabian Sea
- (d) Mediterranean Sea

**Answer: (b)**

3. Kharg Island's oil terminal was primarily developed after:

- (a) 1959 oil discovery
- (b) 1979 Islamic Revolution
- (c) 1980s Iran-Iraq War
- (d) 2018 JCPOA withdrawal

**Answer: (a)**

4. Which of the following is a major implication of the Kharg Island strike for India?

- (a) Reduced remittances from Europe
- (b) Widening Current Account Deficit due to oil imports
- (c) Boost to domestic coal production
- (d) Strengthening of SAARC ties

**Answer: (b)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "The targeting of Kharg Island underscores the fragility of global energy supply chains." Discuss the geopolitical significance and implications for international trade. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the role of chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz in West Asian conflicts. How does this affect India's strategic interests? (10 marks / 150 words)

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3. “Energy security remains a cornerstone of India's foreign policy amid West Asia volatility.”  
Examine in the context of the 2026 Kharg Island incident and suggest mitigation strategies. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “From Oil Hubs to Conflict Zones: The Strategic Importance of Persian Gulf Infrastructure in Global Geopolitics - India's Imperatives.”

